

district levels. She has served as VFW post and district commander. She has held chairmanships on the national level and has been on the National Women Veterans Committee for the past 3 years. She currently serves as senior vice commander of the Kentucky VFW, and this Saturday she will be named the first female veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW.

We owe our veterans an unimaginable debt for their service to our country. In this new post Martha will continue to serve her Nation by advocating on veterans' behalf. Martha works to make real the VFW's vision: ensuring that veterans are respected for their service and recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of a grateful America.

So today I ask that my Senate colleagues join me in recognizing Martha J. Cassity's lifetime of service to our country and wishing her well in her new post as veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW. She is a true friend to Kentucky veterans, to the Commonwealth, and to our country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

HONORING TWO GREAT MEN

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to join our Republican leader in recognizing the birthday of the 41st President of the United States, George H.W. Bush. It is possible that nobody ever came to the Presidency with a preparation that exceeded his in both diplomacy—he served as the first U.S. emissary to China in those decades and he served as the head of the CIA. He served as Vice President.

I was just reading a few days ago another and new retelling of what happened as the Soviet bloc fell apart—the importance of both President Reagan and President Bush, who brought his unique background to that time when it was so unpredictable what might happen. Frankly, the results turned out to be carefully managed by this President as the Berlin Wall fell, as these countries came together, and President Bush's skills were in great evidence, as they were when the coalition was put together to push back what the Iraqis had done in Kuwait.

But probably his greatest example to all of us is an example of a man of kindness and generosity—some would say an almost too forgiving nature to have risen in politics as he did. But on his 90th birthday it is a good time for Americans to reflect about his service to the country. His wife's birthday was just a few days ago, and on her birthday we also want to think about their family and what their family has meant to the country.

My understanding is that President Bush has announced that he intends to jump out of an airplane for the third decade in a row as he did on his 70th birthday and 80th birthday, and will do

on this 90th birthday. I am not sure the judgment to do that is quite as good as the judgment he showed in managing the future of the country. But if you are 90, you only get to be 90 once, and I am sure he is the only 90-year-old President to have jumped out of an airplane in 3 different decades. We appreciate the service of George H.W. Bush to his country, from signing up to be the youngest pilot in World War II until the service that he continues to provide as a former President of the United States.

I was thinking about him and the other World War II veterans as we see them leave us as heads of families, as examples we could turn to, and of the thought of another veteran whom one of my colleagues was mentioning just a few days ago, Senator MORAN's father Raymond Moran.

Raymond Moran died on D-day at 98 years old. Senator MORAN and I have been good friends for a long time. I know we speak on this floor in the Senate about "my good friend, our long time relationship." This is a case where we really have been close friends. We have been so close that in the couple of decades now that we have known each other, I have heard a lot about JERRY MORAN's father and his mother.

JERRY was lucky enough to have both of his parents until just a couple of years ago, and his mom and dad were together until just a couple of years ago. JERRY's father was a staff sergeant in North Africa and in Italy. He was not part of the D-day invasion, even though his death on June 6, the 70th Anniversary of D-day, is a significant day for all the veterans of that conflict.

The stories I heard about Senator MORAN's father were the stories that you would think a man from Plainville, KS, would be part of—quiet, unassuming, church-going, passing along the values that he stood for to his family, and working hard and believing in some way that somehow his children could do anything they wanted to do. Then he had the opportunity to see his son in the Congress of the United States representing that huge district in western Kansas and then in the Senate of the United States.

These two stories are very different—the stories of George H.W. Bush and Raymond Moran. But the lives that these two men led are very similar in the values that they stood for and the values of their generation—the generation that Tom Brokaw called "the greatest generation." These are fundamental and foundational values to what we are all about as a nation.

HEALTH CARE

This week the Senate stepped up united as we seldom are these days to talk about the veterans of that war and our other wars and the obligation that we have to our veterans. The bill that the Senate passed yesterday, which I

cosponsored and I voted for, can be better and, frankly, it will be better after we get a chance to have a conference with our House colleagues—maybe a conference similar to the conferences we used to hold. It is time we get back to the normal way of doing business.

But the underlying approach and key significant change this bill the Senate passed yesterday brings to the veterans is more options and more opportunities. Particularly our younger veterans want to see more choices. They want to have more information.

When Senator STABENOW and I sponsored and initially put the bill forward in early 2013, the Excellence in Mental Health Act, the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were among our greatest supporters along with law enforcement and the mental health community. This was for an act they thought had the potential to provide more options for treatment, more places to go, more ways to get the mental health treatment and access you would like to have that worked with family, that worked with jobs. These are young veterans who left the military but still have lots of obligations that they want to, need to, and should be trying to fulfill for themselves, their families, and the work they have chosen to do, so the assistance we can give them with more options is important.

This bill will give veterans more options. If the Veterans' Administration fails to meet their needs in an appropriate way or if a veteran is 40 miles or an hour away—or any way you measure traffic and time—from a veterans facility, that veteran will have the ability to permanently get the care they need at any facility that accepts Medicare patients at the Medicare rate, and that would be the reimbursement rate the government and the VA will be obligated to pay.

Even if a veteran lives next door to a VA hospital, if that hospital could not see that veteran within the time the law will ultimately decide is the critical time—by the way, there are occasions when the critical time is right away. For a veteran suffering from a heart attack or contemplating suicide, there is no waiting period for them. If a veteran can't be seen within 14 days for routine medical care, that veteran will get a card that says they can go wherever they want to go.

I hope that is the way this final bill works out so veterans will have lots of options. I think the Veterans' Administration is going to be better if they have to compete. I have thought that for a long time.

I was at the Truman veterans facility—I stand here at one of the desks Harry Truman used when he was in the Senate. His name is carved in the desk drawer. Anyway, I was at the Truman veterans facility in Columbia, MO, with my longtime good friend Dewey Rehms, who advises me on veterans issues with the VFW, and we were meeting with the people who run that hospital. Dewey Rehms said: As Senator BLUNT has been saying for at least

10 years, we need to have more options for veterans, and I am here today to say that I think he has been right. Even though defenders and advocates of veterans hospitals and veterans systems want to make it better, we have been slow to embrace the idea that they want more options, but they, along with Congress, are now willing to accept more options, and this system will be better because veterans will have more choices.

There are some issues that the Veterans' Administration is clearly better at than other facilities, and if they are not better than anybody else in dealing with those issues, we need to ask why. They are better at dealing with injuries that result from IEDs and explosive attacks, and so they should be better at dealing with eye injuries, loss of limb, and rehabilitation than anybody else in America. They should also be better at dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder than anybody else in America. But there is no reason they would be better at dealing with cancer or a heart problem or a lung issue. There is no reason to believe that at all.

This is the time to really rethink not what is best for the Veterans' Administration but what is best for the veterans. Our goal should be doing what is best for veterans, not what is best for the Veterans' Administration.

We have all seen the list, and too many Missouri facilities are high on that list with veterans waiting to get service. We have all heard about the lists and heard the stories about supervisors from one facility after another. And I am sure not every facility is telling the people they supervise: Here is how we are going to manage the people who want to be here so that it appears we are doing a better job than we are doing.

We have had enough of that. We have had enough with appearing to be doing a better job than they are doing. Now is the time to insist that they do a better job. I think we took a big step in that direction yesterday.

I look forward to this bill improving as the House and Senate work together to bring the two bills to a final vote so it can get on the President's desk to be signed into law and ultimately change the way we deal with veterans.

While I am on the floor, I have a few additional items to mention. My office continues to get more letters about the unintended consequences when government thinks it can better manage people's health care than they can themselves. I have three examples with me today that have come into my office over the last few days.

Brandon from St. James, MO, said:

I purchased a separate health insurance policy for my college-aged son because it was cheaper than continuing to carry a family policy. It was a good policy with a decent deductible through Blue Cross Blue Shield. We received a notice that his insurance was going to be cancelled. This was alarming to us and just plain wrong. The goal of Obamacare was supposed to get more people

insured. Instead it was doing the opposite, it was cancelling his insurance.

Brandon goes on to say:

Then we got another notice later saying that he could keep his current insurance after the President decided to extend the mandate for another year.

Brandon says now he is concerned about what will happen—as many people are—at the end of that year.

The more we postpone and delay and say the law doesn't mean what the law says, the more we are confused. When you have a bad law, postponing and delaying it has some merit.

Jerry from Jefferson City says he has a plan with really good benefits. Under the President's health care plan, his plan will now and in the future be subject to an additional tax because he was fortunate enough to have a really good plan.

If they are really trying to get people the insurance they want—and hopefully as good an insurance plan as they could have—that is not something you would expect them to do.

The third example is from Earl, who resides in Palmyra, MO. He said he is a senior citizen and found that his long-time preferred doctor is no longer in the network, so he has to pay to see the doctor he has always seen. His doctor visits have gone from \$20 a visit to \$45 a visit. So much for the pledge that if you like your health insurance, you can keep it or if you like your doctor, you can keep him.

I hope we can find a way to rally around the health care challenge for everybody the way we figured out a way to rally around the health care challenge for veterans. We need a system that doesn't create all kinds of unintended consequences but just makes it easier for people to have access to the insurance they want, not the insurance the government says they should have.

I see my colleagues are joining me, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WALSH). The Senator from Maine.

TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a great American, President George Herbert Walker Bush, on the occasion of his 90th birthday. As I reflect upon his remarkable life, I am amazed that he has managed to pack so many accomplishments into just 90 short years. In fact, today President Bush will mark this milestone by doing what he has done on other birthdays so many times: He will jump out of an airplane—or as Barbara Bush once put it, he will jump out of a perfectly good airplane.

President Bush has spent every summer of his life—except during the war years—at the family home in Kennebunkport, ME. A few years ago his neighbors in Kennebunkport came together to acquire a Navy ship's anchor in his honor. It is a fitting tribute

to President Bush, who so often describes Walker's Point in Maine as his anchor to the windward. It is fitting in another way. As a Navy aviator in World War II, as a Member of Congress, as U.N. Ambassador, as an envoy to China, as Director of the CIA, as Vice President, and as President, George Bush embodies the values that are the anchor of American society. Courage, duty, honor, and compassion define our Nation and his life.

I am sure it is a great joy for him to share this special day with his First Lady Barbara Bush, who also recently celebrated a birthday and who has done so much to promote family literacy in this country.

Last night our Senate colleagues unanimously passed a resolution that I submitted with dozens of our colleagues, including Maine Senator ANGUS KING, the two Senators from Texas, and our two leaders, wishing both President and Mrs. Bush the happiest of birthdays and honoring them. The love within this extraordinary family anchors their commitment to one another, to their community, to their two home States, and to their Nation.

Another great President, Abraham Lincoln, spoke a great many eternal truths that still inspire us today. Nothing he said was ever truer than this:

It's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.

President George H.W. Bush has filled his years with a lifetime of service and contributions marked by integrity and humility. I wish him and his family many more years of celebration, and I thank him for his extraordinary service and dedication to the country he loves so much.

I thank the Presiding Officer and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. WYDEN. Last night the Senate passed the Intelligence authorization bill, and it contains some very important provisions relating to whistleblowers. While Senator COLLINS is on the floor, I wish to commend her for her extraordinary work on this issue. She has been at this for years, and it is a pleasure to be able to team up with her in this effort. I think it is fair to say both of us are very appreciative of the work done by our chair, Senator FEINSTEIN, who did so much to make this possible.

I am going to be very brief. Chairman HARKIN has some important remarks to make this morning. He graciously allowed me to go ahead of him.

I wish to reflect a little bit on where we are with respect to whistleblowers and the ability of intelligence agency employees to speak out on matters that do not affect national security but are important to the debate about how to ensure our country resolutely fights terror and protects the public's right to know.